Recovery-Based System Transformation Strategies:
What Should We Do?
By Mark Ragins

We have come to the point where it is realistic to think about how we could promote a transformation of the mental health system into a recovery based system. We are clearer about what a recovery system would include than about how we are going to get there. Given the likelihood that many people will be resisting this transformation, it behooves us to be clear about our strategies.

This paper is a list of proposed strategic goals. Pursuing these goals will need to be highly individualized. In other words, this list is ideas of where we should be going, not how we're going to get there. Nonetheless, I think it's worth breaking down our lofty recovery vision into more manageable goals.

1) Spread understanding of, and belief in, recovery and inspire people to want recovery based programs
2) Incorporate quality of life outcome data and cost data into program monitoring and accountability
3) Incorporate quality of life program elements (money management, employment, supportive housing, community integration, substance abuse treatment, supportive education, etc.) into mental health programs (leading to creation of integrated service agencies)
4) Widely hire consumers within mental health programs in a variety of roles (part of increased consumer involvement overall)
5) Create recovery oriented infrastructures (charting, goal setting, funding, etc.)
6) Create recovery oriented leadership and cultures
7) Change practice expectations to value recovery practices (collaboration, empowerment, self-help training, lowering boundaries, multiple roles, self disclosure, increased "real" emotional interactions, long tem relationships, etc.) Train, and retrain, staff in these changed practices (especially professionals)
8) Build community coalitions (law enforcement, housing, education, employment, etc.) to advocate for changes in mental health services that benefit society widely and to document outside cost savings of our practices
9) Incorporate engagement strategies for people we struggle to serve who are of substantial social interest (homeless, jail diversion, institutionalized, transitional youth, etc.)

There are substantial ongoing efforts in all of these goal areas and even some experience in the options of how to pursue them effectively in different situations. Transformations of social systems are notoriously hard to achieve. We'll have to work hard.